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ABSTRACT

Problems related to school desegregation are identified in this document. The use of the desegregation case study has fallen short of identifying problems common to the desegregation effort. This failure to isolate commonalities is in itself, a major problem. However, before a useful taxonomy can be developed, a list of the most frequently occurring problems commonly confronted by school systems attempting to desegregate is in order. With this intention in mind, this paper provides a desegregation problem primer. The problems that are listed and discussed briefly include; administrator roles, academic achievement, anxiety, attitudes, budgets, Boards of Education, curriculum, demography, evaluation, facilities, government, housing patterns, involvement of parents and community, judicial reviews, integration of kindergartens, laws and the legal system, magnet schools, neighborhood schools, objectives of desegregation activities, planning, quotas, research, students, Title I of the Elementary Secondary Education Act, teacher unions, violence, white flight, excellence in education, and busing. (Author/AM)

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METROPOLITAN DESEGREGATION: THE PROBLEMS PERSIST

by

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The problems related to school desegregation do indeed persist. One reason for this may be that we have seldom taken the time to identify them. One exception to this is the process developed by Smith, Downs and Lachman (Achieving Effective Desegregation, Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Company, 1973), who describe techniques for dealing with effective desegregation, including specific problems relative to administrative measures, teaching techniques and training, community relations, student adaptation, and curriculum adaptation. Generally speaking, however, educators have tended to deal with problems only after they have evolved into crises.

The use of the desegregation case study has fallen short, in most cases, of identifying problems common to desegregation efforts. This failure to isolate commonalities may itself be one of the major problems.

Just as approaches to the desegregation of schools have been scrutinized (e.g., magnets, pairing, etc.), the problems related to desegregation also need to be given serious systematic attention.

Before a useful taxonomy can be developed, however, it would seem to be appropriate to simply list the most frequently occurring problems. It is the development of such a list of problems, commonly confronted by school systems attempting to desegregate, with which this paper will deal. That which follows may be viewed as a desegregation problem primer.

A is for Administrator. It is also for Achievement, Anxiety, and for Attitude. The leadership role played by both the central office and the school-based administrator is critical to the appropriate initiation and implementation of any desegregation plan. It is the administrator who must provide a bridge between the intent of the plan and its outcomes.

Administrators, depending on their position, must also be skilled in dealing with a number of appropriate publics.

Achievement and its relationship to desegregation is an issue which has been hotly contested for many years. The fact of the matter is, however, that.... "adequate data have not yet been gathered to determine a causal relation between school racial composition and academic achievement. (St. John, School Desegregation, New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1975, page 36).

Anxiety is a natural by-product of change and affects everyone who participates in the process.

Attitudes can be made positive and anxiety can be reduced in direct relationship to the degree that genuine involvement is provided for.

B is for Budget and also for Board of Education members. Is it always expensive to desegregate? No, not always. Sometimes, in fact, due to the consolidation of services and the closing of buildings, money can actually be saved. Nevertheless, in larger cities, desegregation efforts usually do require additional funds. Building alterations, staff development, community training, transportation, and special legal services all cost money. Bearing this in mind, school districts should budget funds, in advance, after having discussed resource needs with the different offices responsible for the implementation of the plan. Federal monies, such as those available through ESAA, might also be secured.

The Board of Education is pivotal to a successful desegregation effort. The Board must be visible to the community and must

function as a unit rather than as separate individuals, each representing a different constituency.

C is for Curriculum. It is quite likely that curriculum adjustments will have to be made as part of the desegregation process. Since students may be shifted from one school to another, consistency in curriculum is important. A good curriculum, supportive of the desegregation process, should also be both sensitive and appropriate to the students being served.

C is also for Community. Though community involvement may be a slow process, it is integral to the success of any desegregation program. A thoroughly informed community is a community which tends to act logically rather than as a result of rumors.

C is also for Conflict and there is the potential for conflict in any desegregation situation. Good communications, advance planning and a liaison with the local rumor control center and community interest agencies will go a long way in reducing the potential for conflict.

D is for Demography. Precise and accurate demographic data are essential in the development of large city desegregation plans. Without appropriate demographic data there is little chance for the development of new school feeder patterns and attendance configurations.

E is for Evaluation. Evaluation of the desegregation process is difficult, but essential. It should begin with a needs assessment (or context evaluation), followed by the selection of appropriate alternate means of providing for desegregation

(or input evaluation.) Perhaps the most critical phase of the evaluative process with respect to its use in assessing desegregation initiatives is the formative or process evaluation activity. Summative or product evaluation will likely be a fairly straightforward accounting procedure.

F is for Facilities. Facilities generally tend to play a major, though somewhat exaggerated role in desegregation. Both the development of new facilities and the alteration of existing facilities must be taken into consideration in the development of magnet schools. Other considerations relate to the pairing of schools, the size of facilities, and the cost of making changes. The advent of a desegregation plan may provide an opportunity to do away with non-fireproof buildings and should always be viewed as a chance to upgrade the students' environment.

G is for Government. The local, state, and federal government all may play a major role in the desegregation process. Governmental jurisdictions, with respect to the courts and the law, and to enforcement, will all impact upon the desegregation process and may, at times, do more to slow it down than to facilitate it.

H is for Housing patterns. The classical argument against the desegregation of schools is that when housing is integrated, so will be the schools. This may be true. However, as educators, we are held responsible for dealing with the schools, not with the real estate market. In a number of instances, boards of education and city governments have dealt directly with

realtors and builders in refusing to plan for schools in new housing develpments unless an advance guarantee was made providing for the integration of the new housing. All persons purchasing such housing knew in advance that both their neighborhood and their neighborhood school would be integrated.

I is for Involvement. The research on planned change stresses the importance of involving people in the change process. As a result of such involvement, individuals acquire a feeling of ownership, and with this feeling comes a tendency to support the proposed change, Community, parents, students, and staff should all be included in the planning, decision-making, and implementation processes. This may necessitate establishing committees, contacting key persons, reviewing plans, and providing for pre-service and in-service orientation to the proposed change.

J is for Judicial review. Generally, cities undergoing school desegregation are, more often than not, doing so as a result of court action. The court may require the local education agency to develop a plan which is then subject to judicial review. If the plan is not approved, it may be modified and once again reviewed. Each time a plan is developed, or an old one modified, the judicial review process may again be activated. Problems created as a result of the process range from one major city having developed ten plans over nine years, to another city being forced to desegregate virtually overnight.

K is for Kindergarten. Kindergarten is one of the best places to begin a successful desegregation effort, but it also tends to be one of the most emotional. Nothing seems to arouse community hostility like the notion of busing five-year-olds. In actuality, those large cities with significant parochial school populations tend to have fairly well integrated kindergartens, (since most urban parochial schools do not provide kindergarten services.) Urban kindergarten youngsters also seem to score well on standardized achievement tests.

It is difficult to creatively desegregate kindergartens in that the use of special curriculum is often already provided. (Who ever heard of a SandBox Magnet?)

L is for Law, Lawyer, and Legal system. Simply knowing the law is not enough. Knowing the school system is essential to being able to develop a desegregation plan based upon the realities of the legal system, and tempered with what is likely to be possible, given the local political and sociological realities. An in-house attorney, thoroughly conversant with the school system, the city, and the legal system, and assigned fulltime to the desegregation process, is the best bet. Because the law is interpreted differently all over, an expert from the west coast may have little impact in the east.

L is also for Liberal, and liberals represent a tremendous potential source of support. Beware, though, of the phoney liberal, who will likely alter his views to suit the current vogue.

M is for Magnet. The magnet school has a great deal of potential in helping to effectuate desegregation, but it should not be viewed as a panacea. Cities are strewn with many unsuccessful magnets; we only hear about those which have succeeded.

M is also for Metropolitanism. Generally, metropolitanism is within the purview of the state, for one LEA cannot dictate policy to another. States will rarely advocate joining districts unless forced to by the federal government, and the feds, in most cases, when confronted with such a situation, wave their "education should be left to the state" flag. The fact that a large number of SMSAs span several states also tends to further muddy the waters of metropolitan desegregation.

N is for Neighborhood school. "Preserve the neighborhood school!" has been the rallying cry of many anti-integration groups. Typically, neighborhood advocates present tough and impassioned arguments. In addition, there is increasing strong support for good (segregated) neighborhood schools within minority communities.

O is for objectives. Seldom are the objectives of a desegregation activity within a school system clearly articulated. Yet, the statement of objectives is the logical starting point. Desegregation is an amorphous term. Where do we wish to go? Where must we end up? Without specific objectives it is virtually impossible to plan effectively.

O is also for Obstruction, and obstructions to the realization of objectives must be conceptualized so that they can be dealt with during the planning process, in advance of the implementation of the desegregation plan.

P is for Planning. Planning is the keystone of any successful desegregation effort. Unfortunately, it is rarely carried out systematically. Instead, most school systems make random forays into the desegregation process. The result, more often than not, is confusion and failure. A network system should be developed in advance of any desegregation effort. Three months of intensive planning may prevent years of frustration.

Q is for Quota. What exactly does desegregation mean? The notion of half of one race and half of another is unrealistic except in rare instances. But equally unrealistic is the expectation that the schools within a system will be able to reflect the exact mix of the student population. Mobility, transportation, and specialized curriculum all create problems in the rigid adherence to specified percentages. Usually a corridor is established on either side of a percentage. Often such parameters also create problems, unless flexibility is built into them.

R is for Research. Research studies in the area of desegregation number in the thousands, and studies can be selected to support any side of the issue. Trying to utilize research in order to justify desegregation is simply the wrong approach.

R is also for Rumor. Rumors are a built-in hazard to the implementation of any change. The use of a total communications program, including a rumor control center will often minimize the adverse effects that rumors can have on a successful desegregation effort.

S is for Student. Students are, after all, the principles being desegregated; and Students must be involved in the planning and process. One way to guarantee failure is to ignore students' potential for making a desegregation program work. All facets of the student must be taken into consideration when planning for desegregation, including their personal feelings, their academic aspirations, and their need to identify with the new school in such areas as its athletic teams and student government.

S is also for Safety. Studies have shown that safety is a major concern for both students and parents and, based upon experiences in Little Rock and in Boston, is a legitimate concern.

T is for Title I. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides services for economically and educationally disadvantaged students. Desegregation and the movement of students from one school to another could, given shifts in the economic make-up of schools, result in the percentage of poverty pupils becoming lower than the eligibility cutoff. In such instances, as a result of desegregation, students may be deprived of services which they would have received in their former (segregated) school.

T is also for Teacher. As the front line facilitator, teachers must be both supportive and sensitive to all problems related to desegregation. Even passive resistance can doom a plan. It must understood, however, that like students, teachers are also sometimes insecure and scared when forced to face a new (desegregated) environment.

U is for Union. Teachers are not the only ones with unions. Principals and supervisors in larger cities are usually also represented. Unions, typically, are very concerned with what is contained in desegregation plans, especially as the contents may apply to assignment processes, transfer policy, inservice training, and safety. Union leadership should always be involved in the desegregation planning process.

V is for Violence. The Lemberg Center for the Study of Violence reported that racially related civil disorders rose from 11% (20 incidents) in 1967 to 58% (472 incidents) in 1969. It is believed that this pace somewhat slackened in the early 70's, but again accelerated with the problems in Boston. 1977-1978 has thus far been quieter than initially expected. Most school systems are capable of achieving desegregation without serious violence, but to do so requires careful preparation.

W is for White flight. There has been much discussion in recent years about the white exodus from cities. The trend can easily be substantiated from data collected over the past three decades. In addition, a number of theories dealing with the so-called tipping point of individual schools have recently been developed. Research has not shown, however, that white flight is related to desegregation efforts so much as it is to housing patterns, employment, and crime.

X is for eXcellence (with a bit of license). John Gardner has posed the question -- "Can we be equal and excellent, too?" Those of us who believe in an integrated society, say, "Yes."

Unfortunately, the pervasive fear that desegregation will lead to destruction, often continues as a major roadblock to the achievement of excellence in education.

Y is for Yellow, and yellow is the color of most school buses. While over twenty million pupils are now being bussed for reasons other than desegregation, busing is not a popular notion. White opinion is divided, but the majority rush to defend the neighborhood school if bussing, except for very short distances, is mentioned. Black opinion, is heavily in favor of desegregation (over 90% in some places). Yet, in a 1972 Harris poll, only 52% of the black population sampled favored bussing to achieve racial balance.

Z is for Zero, and zero is the amount of progress a school system, particularly large city school systems, are likely to make unless they take seriously the problems inherent in providing for desegregation and develop contingencies to deal with them.

I may have exhausted the alphabet, but I can assure you, that I have not begun to exhaust the problems which our cities will face as they attempt to desegregate their schools. Problem identification is an important first step, however; for until we define the problems, we cannot hope to develop solutions.